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AUTHOR	Hamilton, John
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ABSTRACT

A study was undertaken at Georgia's Gainesville College to compare the distribution of grades awarded in academic courses in fall 1990 with those in fall 1996. Study findings included the following: (1) the overall college-wide pass rate in academic courses rose from 65.1% in fall 1990 to 68.6% in fall 1996; (2) excluding students who withdrew by mid-quarter, pass rates were 73% for fall 1990 and 80.1% for fall 1996; (3) for the college's six divisions (i.e., humanities, speech and fine arts, science and technology, mathematics and computer science, social sciences, and business), mathematics and computer science had the lowest pass rates for both years studied, with 43.4% of students passing in 1990 and 48.5% in 1996; (4) for the speech and fine arts department, the pass rate actually dropped from 74.5% in 1990 to 70.9% in 1996; and (5) more "A's" and "B's" and fewer "D's" and "F's" were awarded in fall 1996 than in fall 1990. The study also suggested seven factors influencing the grade distribution, including the implementation of computer-assisted learning strategies across campus, the implementation of a college preparatory curriculum in area high schools, the establishment of incentive grants to encourage students to study harder, and an increase in the number of students who withdraw from courses. (BCY)

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ED 416 920

Grade Distributions for the Fall of 1990 and 1996

John Hamilton

Gainesville College

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interoffice
MEMORANDUM

To: Dr. Kathy Fuller

From: John Hamilton

Subject: Grade distributions for fall of 1990 and 1996

Date: February 11, 1997

Enclosed are grade distributions for the four and five credit academic courses at Gainesville College for the fall quarters of 1990 and 1996. A comparison of percent pass rates with a 'C' or better accompany the data table for the fall of 1996. Grade distributions for developmental studies are shown as well. Percentages for a given grade and for pass rates with a 'C' or better were calculated in two ways: (1) with W's used to calculate the totals, and (2) without W's used to calculate the totals. The grade of W is ambiguous to interpret. It is not possible to know why a student dropped a course by mid-term. Most drop to avoid receiving a grade of D or F, but there are other reasons as well.

Summary: Between the fall of 1990 and the fall of 1996, overall grade distributions improved markedly at the College. In the fall of 1990, the College-wide percent pass rate for all students who started a four or five academic credit class was 65.1 percent as compared to 68.6 percent for the fall of 1996 (3.5% change). If one excludes the students who withdrew by mid-quarter, then the percent pass rate for the fall of 1990 and 1996 climb to 73.0 and 80.1, respectively (7.1% change). Although it is tempting to explain this phenomenon as grade inflation, there are many variables that impact percent pass rates. One would want to be careful not to assume grade inflation and "punish" students for studying hard and doing well at the College by instituting policies that tighten standards and raise the bar a couple of notches.

Some observations:

- During the fall of 1996, fully 80 percent of the students who enrolled in four or five credit courses and who remained with the course past the mid-quarter point (i.e. did not withdraw) passed with a 'C' or better. If those students who withdrew are considered and used to calculate the denominator, then almost 70 percent of all the students who started a given class passed with a 'C' or better. Pass rates vary across campus from one division or department to another.
- The Department of Mathematics and Computer Science had the lowest percent pass rates (around 50% with W's included in the total). The Business Division had the highest percent pass rates (80% with W's included)
- The Department of Speech and Fine Arts as well as the Department of Mathematics and Computer Science had relatively high withdrawal rates during the fall of 1996 (20 to 30%)

- From the fall of 1990 to the fall of 1996, overall percent pass rates for the College have increased by 3.5% (with 'Ws' in the total) or 7.1% (without 'Ws').
- Percent pass rates dropped from the fall of 1990 to the fall of 1996 in Speech and Fine Arts (when 'Ws' are included in the totals) and in the Social Sciences Division.
- In general, as a percent of the total there were more A's and B's awarded to students in the fall of 1996 as compared to the fall of 1990 and fewer D's and F's.

Factors that influence grade distributions include

1. Major efforts across campus to improve instructional delivery to include computer-assisted learning strategies.
2. The Fresh Start program which began in the summer of 1993 affects the fall quarter enrollments and presumably improves the preparedness and motivation of students for serious college study. Some of these students may decide to go to Lanier Technical Institute rather than enter the College. This might result in moving academically weaker students away from the College.
3. Implementation of the College Preparatory Curriculum in area high schools may be increasing the readiness of incoming students. For example, average SAT scores at the College for incoming freshmen increased from 829 in the fall of 1990 to 843 in the fall of 1994. Overall the average SAT score for students as a whole has been going up over the years (recentering of the SAT scores last year makes it difficult to track historical trends).
4. Curriculum changes across campus impact grade distributions in various ways (e.g. introduction of the non-majors biology sequence and Mat 104, higher expectations from students participating in DS program).
5. Possible softening of grading policies on campus, a slackening of expectations, and the possibility that College is not toughening up its standards in response to a better prepared student coming out of high school (i.e. grade inflation).
6. HOPE grant incentives encourage students to study harder to maintain 'B' averages (the increased rate of withdrawal by the mid-quarter may in part be tied to this). The risk of the losing any type of financial support has the same effect.
7. Increasing numbers of students as a percentage of the whole are withdrawing from courses prior to the midpoint of the quarter. This impacts the number of students who might otherwise receive D's and F's.

Grade Distributions for 4 and 5 Academic Credit Courses
Fall 1990 and Fall 1996
Gainesville College

Dr. Hamilton, OPIR, February 1997

Note: Only 4 or 5 credit academic courses were used for grade distributions. DS grade distributions are noted on a separate line.

Grade Distributions for Five Credit Academic Courses

Fall 1990

	A	B	C	D	F	WF	F/WF	W	Total w/W	Total w/o W	I	V	%Pass >=C
Humanities	**93**	**238**	**333**	**99**	**65**	**21**	**86**	**117**	**1052**	**935**	**0**		
%Tot w/W	8.8	22.6	31.7	9.4	6.2	2.0	8.2	11.1	100.0				63.1
%Tot w/o W	9.9	25.5	35.6	10.6	7.0	2.2	9.2	12.5		100.0			71.0
Speech/Fine Arts	**37**	**112**	**56**	**4**	**13**	**2**	**15**	**36**	**275**	**239**	**4**		
%Tot w/W	13.5	40.7	20.4	1.5	4.7	0.7	5.5	13.1	100.0				74.5
%Tot w/o W	15.5	46.9	23.4	1.7	5.4	0.8	6.3	15.1		100.0			85.8
Science and Tech	**101**	**166**	**191**	**61**	**54**	**1**	**55**	**78**	**707**	**629**	**2**		
%Tot w/W	14.3	23.5	27.0	8.6	7.6	0.1	7.8	11.0	100.0				64.8
%Tot w/o W	16.1	26.4	30.4	9.7	8.6	0.2	8.7	12.4		100.0			72.8
Mathematics	**74**	**109**	**134**	**78**	**99**	**14**	**113**	**110**	**731**	**621**	**4**		
%Tot w/W	10.1	14.9	18.3	10.7	13.5	1.9	15.5	15.0	100.0				43.4
%Tot w/o W	11.9	17.6	21.6	12.6	15.9	2.3	18.2	17.7		100.0			51.0
Social Sciences	**326**	**457**	**287**	**77**	**60**	**11**	**71**	**87**	**1376**	**1289**	**5**		
%Tot w/W	23.7	33.2	20.9	5.6	4.4	0.8	5.2	6.3	100.0				77.8
%Tot w/o W	25.3	35.5	22.3	6.0	4.7	0.9	5.5	6.7		100.0			83.0
Business, LAM	**82**	**183**	**157**	**58**	**48**	**3**	**51**	**97**	**679**	**582**	**3**		
%Tot w/W	12.1	27.0	23.1	8.5	7.1	0.4	7.5	14.3	100.0				62.2
%Tot w/o W	14.1	31.4	27.0	10.0	8.2	0.5	8.8	16.7		100.0			72.5
TOTALS	***713***	***1265***	***1158***	***377***	***339***	***52***	***391***	***525***	***4820***	***4295***	***18***	***0***	
%Tot w/W	*14.8*	*26.2*	*24.0*	*7.8*	*7.0*	*1.1*	*8.1*	*10.9*	*100.0*				***65.1***
%Tot w/o W	*16.6*	*29.5*	*27.0*	*8.8*	*7.9*	*1.2*	*9.1*	*12.2*		*100.0*			***73.0***

**Mathematics includes MAT, CSC, and STA; Science and Tech courses are all 5 credit course (lecture and lab)*
Humanities does not include ESL courses; Speech and Fine Arts includes speech, journalism, and fine arts (music, drama, and art)

Fall 1990

	A	B	C	D	F	WF	F/WF	W	Total w/W	Total w/o W	I	V	IP	U	U2
DS	**78**	**234**	**206**	**2**	**86**	**17**	**103**	**88**	**814**	**726**	**3**	**7**	**224**	**27**	**8**
%Tot w/W	9.6	28.7	25.3	0.2	10.6	2.1	12.7	10.8	100.0						
%Tot w/o W	10.7	32.2	28.4	0.3	11.8	2.3	14.2	12.1		100.0					

DS - Developmental Studies

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Grade Distributions for Four and Five Credit Academic Courses

Fall 1996

	A	B	C	D	F	WF	F/WF	W	Total w/W	Total w/o W	I	V	%Pass w/>=C 1996	%Pass w/>=C 1990	%Chng 90 to 96
Humanities	**150**	**318**	**290**	**50**	**45**	**4**	**49**	**152**	**1058**	**906**	**3**				
%Tot w/W	14.2	30.1	27.4	4.7	4.3	0.4	4.6	14.4	100.0				**71.6**	**63.1**	**8.5**
%Tot w/o W	16.6	35.1	32.0	5.5	5.0	0.4	5.4	16.8		100.0			**83.7**	**71.0**	**12.6**
Speech/Fine Arts	**41**	**113**	**85**	**14**	**7**	**2**	**9**	**66**	**337**	**271**	**4**	**1**			
%Tot w/W	12.2	33.5	25.2	4.2	2.1	0.6	2.7	19.6	100.0				**70.9**	**74.5**	**-3.6**
%Tot w/o W	15.1	41.7	31.4	5.2	2.6	0.7	3.3	24.4		100.0			**88.2**	**85.8**	**2.4**
Science and Tech	**111**	**171**	**133**	**36**	**23**	**4**	**27**	**78**	**583**	**505**	**1**				
%Tot w/W	19.0	29.3	22.8	6.2	3.9	0.7	4.6	13.4	100.0				**71.2**	**64.8**	**6.4**
%Tot w/o W	22.0	33.9	26.3	7.1	4.6	0.8	5.3	15.4		100.0			**82.2**	**72.8**	**9.4**
Mathematics	**110**	**138**	**135**	**56**	**77**	**3**	**80**	**191**	**790**	**599**	**1**	**2**			
%Tot w/W	13.9	17.5	17.1	7.1	9.7	0.4	10.1	24.2	100.0				**48.5**	**43.4**	**5.1**
%Tot w/o W	18.4	23.0	22.5	9.3	12.9	0.5	13.4	31.9		100.0			**63.9**	**51.0**	**12.9**
Social Sciences	**198**	**402**	**347**	**130**	**53**	**5**	**58**	**125**	**1318**	**1193**	**6**				
%Tot w/W	15.0	30.5	26.3	9.9	4.0	0.4	4.4	9.5	100.0				**71.9**	**77.8**	**-5.9**
%Tot w/o W	16.6	33.7	29.1	10.9	4.4	0.4	4.9	10.5		100.0			**79.4**	**83.0**	**-3.6**
Business, LAM	**133**	**170**	**112**	**21**	**14**	**1**	**15**	**52**	**518**	**466**	**4**	**1**			
%Tot w/W	25.7	32.8	21.6	4.1	2.7	0.2	2.9	10.0	100.0				**80.1**	**62.2**	**18.0**
%Tot w/o W	28.5	36.5	24.0	4.5	3.0	0.2	3.2	11.2		100.0			**89.1**	**72.5**	**16.5**
TOTALS	***743***	***1312***	***1102***	***307***	***219***	***19***	***238***	***664***	***4604***	***3940***	***19***	***4***			
%Tot w/W	*16.1*	*28.5*	*23.9*	*6.7*	*4.8*	*0.4*	*5.2*	*14.4*	*100.0*				***68.6***	***65.1***	***3.5***
%Tot w/o W	*18.9*	*33.3*	*28.0*	*7.8*	*5.6*	*0.5*	*6.0*	*16.9*		*100.0*			***80.1***	***73.0***	***7.1***

Science and Tech couses are 4 hour lecture courses (lab grade distributions not included in this study)

Mathematics is separate department from Natural Sciences and Technology

Speech and Fine Arts have been split out of Humanities (Speech, Journalism, Music, Art, Drama)

Fall 1996

	A	B	C	D	F	WF	F/WF	W	Total w/W	Total w/o W	I	V	IP	U	U2
DS	**56**	**179**	**132**	**3**	**72**	**17**	**89**	**110**	**658**	**548**	**4**	**2**	**87**	**31**	**22**
%Tot w/W	8.5	27.2	20.1	0.5	10.9	2.6	13.5	16.7	100.0						
%Tot w/o W	10.2	32.7	24.1	0.5	13.1	3.1	16.2	20.1		100.0					

DS - Developmental Studies

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